

## MODULE A: Comparative Study of Texts and Context – Texts in Time

This module requires students to **compare texts** in order to **explore them in relation to their contexts**. It develops students' understanding of the effects of **context** and questions of **value**.

### From the BOS Prescriptions

*'In this elective, students will explore how **meanings of a pair of texts** can be **shaped and reshaped** by **considering the nature of the connections** between them. **Exploration of the connections** between the texts will enhance understanding of the **values and contexts** of each text. **Relationships between these texts may be implicit or explicit. Connections may be established through direct or indirect references, contexts, values, ideas, and the use of language forms and features**' (BOS Prescriptions 2009 – 2012).*

*"Art at its most significant is a distant early warning system that can always be relied on to tell the old culture what is beginning to happen"* Marshall McLuhan.

### Module A: Comparative Study of Texts and Contexts - Examination Rubric

In your answer you will be assessed on how well you:

- demonstrate understanding of the **meanings** of a pair of texts when considered together
- **evaluate** the relationships between texts and **contexts**
- organise, develop and express ideas using language appropriate to audience, purpose and form

### Approach

- **Similar content:** Humanity using technology to challenge nature and the limitations of life provides the narrative frame for both texts.
- **Framing the response:**
- A range of theses or lines of arguments: The ethical and moral dilemma explored by both texts provides you with fertile ground for crafting an integrated comparison and contrast that considers explicitly the influence of times, **contexts** and **values**
- Grounded in context, times and values
- Integrated through the meaning conveyed by the consideration of characterisation, setting, language features, ideas, etc. in both texts, such as:
  - ❖ The **creators** and the **creations**
  - ❖ The **director** and the **observer**
  - ❖ **The ideas:** mortality, humanity, identity, morality, exploitation, conscience, hubris, myopia...
- Leading to what you have discovered about life and humanity after considering **BOTH** texts!

The question will focus on **an aspect of the texts** or a **link between them**. You need find the **connections between the texts**

Ideas	The Texts	Values
Conscience	Shelley offers a chilling warning about the impact of evils of science and its negative ramifications for nature. Frankenstein transgresses the boundaries of nature and ignores familial duty in his pursuit of scientific accolades.	Integrity Compassion Humility
Hubris/Myopia	Shelley is critical of the arrogance of the Romantic imagination that privileges the individual over the community. Shelley's obsession with eyes reflects a preoccupation with the ethical vision of humanity. The act of	Moderation Humility Love

	seeing is inseparable from moral vision in <i>Blade Runner</i> . The Voight-Kompft Test is a motif for subjective consciousness and the moral vision of humanity. Tyrell's myopic physical and moral short-sightedness reflects his arrogance and pride. Even the camera's gaze demands the viewer to question their own humanity.	
Humanity/Obsession	Both texts privilege empathy as the distinctively human trait, the basis of morality and solidarity with one's fellow beings. Shelley makes us aware that our humanity is defined by our relationships with others. Walton, Frankenstein and Tyrell's obsessions are lonely pursuits. Henry Clerval epitomises compassion and kindness. <i>'Could aught ill entrench on the noble spirit of Clerval? So perfectly humane, so thoughtful in his generosity - so full of kindness and tenderness amidst his passion for adventurous exploit.'</i> Victor and Tyrell exhibited moral failure, not because of what they created, but because they abandoned their responsibilities and suppressed their humanity. Tyrell's cold, indifferent attitude to Rachel is a reflection of the calculating inhumanity of the corporate capitalist. The politicisation of language and the commodification of the post-industrial world threaten the value and special significance given to humanity. At the end of his life, Roy displays the most enlightened and transcendent of all human emotions, compassion and integrity. Like a Christ-like figure, Batty dies for the sins of humanity and the sin of being human - hands an eloquent and moving soliloquy before he dies: <i>'I've seen things you people wouldn't believe...All those moments will be lost in time like tears in rain. Time to die.'</i>	Empathy Love Compassion Moderation
Mortality	Shelley had suffered the loss of friends, family and unborn children. Her novel is dominated by death and destruction. Frankenstein originally pursues a way to ensure immortality. <i>'Wealth was an inferior object; but what glory would attend the discovery, if I could banish disease from the human frame, and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death!'</i> The replicants strive for an extension to their life span.	Humility
Identity	In both texts there is a blurring of what it means to be human. The wretch and the replicants are more human in their behavior than their creators; however, a parallel can be drawn between Frankenstein and his creation. Deckard begins to question what it means to be human. Even Tyrell states that the replicants are <i>'more human than human.'</i>	Empathy Love Compassion

### Social, Cultural and Historical Context

<i>Frankenstein</i>	Values	<i>Blade Runner</i>	Values
<b>Political context:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>American Civil War and later the French revolution brought ideas of popular freedom, of the power of the proletariat and of</li> </ul>	Freedom Integrity Equality Liberalism	<b>Political:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rise of rampant consumerism, the corporate pursuit of profit at all costs, and the suppression of trade unions.</li> <li>Vietnam War has left a nation disillusioned and cynical.</li> </ul>	Society: Materialism Individualism  Scott: Moderation

<p>the right to equality. The French Revolution can be seen as both the epitome and the end of the Enlightenment: a movement in favour of social justice, and against traditional authority. However, it was a terrible demonstration of humanity. Reason and ideas of equality could not counter tyranny and injustice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ In England the time of revolution was one of fear. As a result, a number of strict laws were passed in an attempt to secure the nation's stability. Public meetings were banned, habeas corpus was suspended and those advocating even moderate political change were charged with high treason in time of war. Prime Minister Spencer Perceval was assassinated in 1812 by a failed businessman.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ President Reagan implementing economic rationalism that led to high levels of unemployment and the removal of welfare support. (Only relevant to Director's Cut)</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Cultural context</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Romantics: The Romantic Period is the historical period in which <i>Frankenstein</i> was written. It stretches from 1785 to 1830. Freedom of thought and expression, spontaneity, individuality, a celebration of nature and a belief that anything was possible. Rousseau and Edmund Burke wrote about the rights of the individual.</li> <li>▪ Gothic Genre: Fascination with supernatural.</li> </ul>	<p>Freedom Individualism Beauty Truth Wisdom</p>	<p><b>Cultural context</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Postmodernism: Postmodern texts question authority, power and truth; reflecting the cynicism and loss of faith that followed the dropping of the atomic bomb. <i>Blade Runner</i> is a product of postmodernity. It is a pastiche of styles and fads, different genres and intertextual references to a range of other films with no perceivable geographical or historical centre. There is a postmodern identity crisis. The ontological weight in the film is in signs and symbols.</li> <li>▪ Refinement Period: Hybrid text emerging; <i>Blade Runner</i> is a blend of the western, sci fi, neo-</li> </ul>	<p>Individualism Freedom Liberalism</p>

<p><i>Frankenstein</i> is a polyvalent blend of gothic genre with a newly emerging sci fi. <i>'the dark irrational side of human nature - the savage egoism, the perverse impulses, and the nightmarish terrors that lie beneath the controlled and ordered surface of the conscious mind'</i> (Introduction to the Norton Anthology of English Literature Vol II, 1993, M H Abrams ed.).</p>		<p>expressionism, romanticism and tech noir. Contradictory mélange of genres suggests ideological confusion and conflict.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Multiculturalism: Global community increasing through migration.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Social Context:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Enlightenment period (Prior to Romantic period) - an age when reason ruled. The Enlightenment freed science from the trammels of theological tradition leading to extraordinary scientific discoveries such as electricity – Galvani.</li> <li>▪ Industrial Revolution: Societal transformation with an industrial revolution: pollution, child labour and poverty. Change from a largely agricultural society to a modern industrial nation, and with this change came a shift in the balance of economic power - the aristocracy's influence waned as that of the wealthy, industry-owning middle classes grew.</li> <li>▪ John Locke's 17th century essays argued that when individuals are born they are neither good nor evil, but as they grow their attitudes, values and</li> </ul>	<p>Society: Individualism Materialism</p> <p>Shelley: Compassion Moderation</p>	<p><b>Social Context:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Technology: Extinction of many natural species, the threat of acid rain and global warming. Prolonging life and beginning to investigate the possibilities of genetics. Cloning began in 1963 in China with a carp. The film's urban images present a world where advanced capitalism's worst features have coalesced to produce a polluted, overpopulated city in a society controlled by giant corporations. Scott: <i>'I was always aware that this whole Earth is on overload. I've been that way for 30 years.'</i></li> <li>▪ Multinationalism and Globalisation: Corporate exploitation and commodification privileged. Large multinational companies vying for economic control. <i>'Commerce is our goal here at Tyrell. More human than human is our motto.'</i></li> <li>▪ Growth of Asia's economic power.</li> <li>▪ Nuclear Families</li> <li>▪ Women: Birth of the femme-fatale after WWII – the strong, dangerous female. Women still underpaid but have a strong and influential voice. In <i>Blade Runner</i>, all women are replicants that sexualized by men: Pris is a</li> </ul>	<p>Society: Materialism Individualism</p> <p>Scott: Compassion Moderation Empathy Love Community</p>

<p>behaviour are shaped by their early sensory experiences.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Cartesian revolution had a profound impact on the way man saw himself in the cosmos.</li> <li>▪ Women: Subjugated and marginalised - no right to vote and limited legal rights. Death in child birth; Shelley's mother a suffragette, yet, <i>Frankenstein</i> is strikingly devoid of strong female characters. They are passive women who suffer calmly and then die.</li> </ul>		<p>"basic pleasure model"; Zhora is an erotic dancer; Rachel is a copy of Tyrell's niece.</p>	
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### Things to consider when preparing...

- ALL texts reflect the values and context of the time of production.
- What aspects of composers' respective CONTEXTS influence the way each text represents certain characters, themes and values?
- HOW does Shakespeare SHAPE certain characters, ideas and values through his play, and how and why does Pacino RESHAPE these aspects? (What language forms and features of this text type are relevant to your discussion?)
- In RESHAPING Shakespeare's play which scenes does Pacino focus on and why? Think about the characters, ideas and values they represent (and relevance for his context). How does he reshape these scenes through his chosen medium of the docudrama? (What language forms and features are relevant to this text type?)
- Examining the same scenes will enable you to show the connections between the texts.
- Remember, each composer is influenced (either implicitly or explicitly) by their respective contexts which affects WHY and HOW they explore characters, themes and values.

### Comparative Essay Structure

#### Thesis

Ensure you plan your thesis carefully. It provides you with a roadmap for the rest of your essay. The introduction must contain the following four components (not necessarily in this order):

1. Articulate through a THESIS or LINE OF ARGUMENT that responds to the question an understanding of how context shapes and reshapes a text.
2. Express the notion that by exploring connections between texts we gain a greater understanding of language, character, themes or values? – the question creates this.
3. Present two to three KEY IDEAS why/how this is so to support your thesis.

**Question:** Discuss how the changing contexts and values of your prescribed texts has shaped the characterisation of a main character OR one key idea.

## Example introductions

1. *“Cursed, cursed creator! Why did I live? Why in that instant, did I not extinguish the spark of existence which you had so wantonly bestowed?” Scientific experts or technocrats, whilst specialising in their methodical environment, require a deep respect for the value of life and guidance in abiding by these core values. The negative effects and consequences of the abrogation of responsibilities displayed in Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, and Blade Runner Director’s Cut, directed by Ridley Scott will be explored in the quest to highlight the negative views of their societies. Frankenstein is an 1818 ‘macabre gothic tale....written with an enormous emotional power’ which explores the modern Prometheus and questions the societal factors of at the time. Blade Runner Director’s Cut is an American science-fiction film which depicts a dystopian Los Angeles in November 2019, and explores the mass production by the Tyrell Corporation which creates a scathing critique of the Blade Runner society.*
2. *One of the most important and enthralling roles of texts is their ability to examine and criticise the societies from within which they were created, particularly through the fact that the subject matter of a text will be strongly reflective of the period in which they were created. This is particularly true for Mary Shelley’s, gothic horror novel, Frankenstein, written in 1818 and Ridley Scott’s dystopic film Blade Runner, conceived in 1992. Both of these texts effectively provide an in depth examination and indeed a scathing critique of their respective societies.*
3. *Albert Einstein once said that “it had becoming appallingly obvious that our technology has exceeded our humanity.” Now as we look at nameless monster in Mary Shelley’s 1818 novel Frankenstein and Roy Batty in Ridley Scott’s film Blade Runner Director’s Cut from 1992 we can see that what Albert Einstein said is appallingly true. As both texts explore the characterisation of these imitations of humanity, we see a growth and decline in the physiological and emotional state of mind of the wretch and Batty to the extent that their humanity exceeds that of their creators but also to the point where they are inexplicably corrupted and malevolent.*

## Markers will look for...

- How the question is dealt with through the thesis.
- The key ideas and development of the thesis in response to the question.
- Judicious choice of textual examples.
- How context and values are used to inform the response.
- The integrated analysis of the two texts in a comparative study.
- The quality of analysis and evidence to support the thesis.
- The quality of the writing.

## Possible Theses

1. The crafting of the setting in a text is salient as it provides a literal and metaphorical framework for the world the characters move in, and the intended meaning being conveyed to an audience: While the setting of *Frankenstein* still has moments of great beauty and striking descriptions of the natural world, the universe we see in *Blade Runner* – 200 years later – has become the world that Frankenstein feared would arise if he created a female partner for his monster. There is only ugliness and despair: “...a race of devils would be propagated on the earth who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror” (p. 170). Both the ‘creators’ in *Frankenstein* and *Blade Runner* reflect the new emerging world they move in. The setting has provided them with the means and the motives to embrace the technologies. They have pandered to individualism and they lack insight,

- humility and empathy. They are egocentric and indifferent to the needs and feelings of their creations. Tyrell is what Frankenstein feared he would become if he made a female monster.
2. Both texts, through their representation of the lack of humanity in the creators, and the very human qualities and flaws of the creations, raise the question about what is a human.
  3. Both *Frankenstein* and *Blade Runner* explore a dilemma that continues to resonate in the 21st century: the ethical and moral tension between the fear of humanity's abuse of technology because of our inherent flaws such as ambition, ego and greed, and the incredible potential for technology to extend life and even defy death.
  4. The role of women in *Frankenstein* and *Blade Runner* is overshadowed by the actions of men who relentlessly pursue the creation of life through technology. When this right is taken from women their voices are barely heard, and the danger of male hubris leading to myopia resonates.
  5. While deeply conscious of *Frankenstein*, *Blade Runner* evokes the earlier text not with the intention of adapting it but rather of re-engaging with the issues it raises in a new and altered cultural context: at the end of the industrial age and the beginning of the computer era.
  6. When individuals are driven by an inexorable desire to transcend life's limitations by embracing new technologies, they can suppress their humanity and abrogate their responsibilities

## Essay Questions

### Past HSC Questions

- 2011: In what ways does a comparative study accentuate the distinctive contexts of *Frankenstein* and *Blade Runner*?
- 2010: Analyse how *Frankenstein* and *Blade Runner* imaginatively portray individuals who challenge the established values of their times.
- 2009: 'A deeper understanding of disruption and identity emerges from considering the parallels between *Frankenstein* and *Blade Runner*.' Compare how these texts explore disruption and identity.

### Practice Questions

- The creators of *Frankenstein* and *Blade Runner* have anchored their visions in the social and cultural realities of their time. Despite contextual differences, however, at the heart of both texts is a fear that we may not be able to control what we create. Is this your view of these texts?
- In spite of different contexts and values, both Shelley and Scott are concerned with the question of what constitutes true humanity. Explore this statement.
- Both *Frankenstein* and *Blade Runner* share a common premise. If humanity, through scientific advancement, is able to create life artificially, then ethical quandary will arise. How are the relationships between the creator and created used by Scott and Shelley to illustrate a common premise. In your response also explore how they reflect societal concerns of the time in which they were composed.
- Compare the ways in which both texts offer insights into the human experience. (CSSA 2009 Trial)
- While texts are products of their times, the composers of each text are both concerned that the quest for understanding and knowledge has left our values vulnerable. The notion of responsibility is the critical connection between *Frankenstein* and *Blade Runner*. (ETA 2009 Trial)
- 'The elective, Texts in Time, makes respondents consider ideas in a new light.' How did your prescribed texts make you see the concept of progress in a new light?

- A deeper understanding of compassion and hubris emerges from considering the parallels between *Frankenstein* and *Blade Runner*. Compare how these texts explore compassion and hubris. (North Sydney Girls 2010 Trial)
- Both Mary Shelley and Ridley Scott create worlds in which the pursuit of perfection is seen as futile. Do you agree? (Strathfield Girls 2010 Trial).
- ‘Despite having been composed in different times texts can reflect the enduring values which human beings share.’ To what extent do the two ‘Texts in Time’ you have studied lead you to accept this statement?
- ‘The values of each age are reflected in the texts which are composed in them.’ To what extent do the two ‘Texts in Time’ you have studied lead you to accept this statement?
- “The most interesting aspect of texts written in different times is seeing the differences in what people value.” Evaluate this opinion in relation to the novel, *Frankenstein*, and the film, *Blade Runner*. In your response make detailed references to both texts. (Independent 2009 Trial)
- How does the comparison of language and ideas help us gain a heightened understanding of context and values in *Frankenstein* and *Blade Runner*? (Baulkham Hills HS 2010 Trial)
- “Times change but human values remain static.” Discuss this statement with close reference to the context, values and language of both *Frankenstein* and *Blade Runner*. (James Ruse 2010 Trial)
- When we investigate a pair of texts that share similar view of the world, we are able to see more clearly the power of context in influencing these views. To what extent has this statement been true of your study of the TWO prescribed texts in this elective? (St Ignatius Riverview 2010 Trial)
- The significant similarities between the texts are more important than their difference. Explore this statement by making close reference to the TWO texts you have studied.
- Does *Blade Runner* enhance or trivialise Shelley’s *Frankenstein*? Support your view by referring to your TWO prescribed texts in detail. (ETA 2009 Trial)
- ‘Texts on their own are interesting but when you compare them to other texts they become illuminating and dynamic.’ How has your exploration of the shared ideas of *Frankenstein* and *Blade Runner* moved you to a heightened appreciation of each text?
- What insights have you gained from your comparative study of texts despite differences in form and features? (Fort Street HS 2010 Trial)

## Markers Feedback

You should explain the significance of the similarities in texts – what ideas/issues are universal/timeless to human society? Explain how context is reflected in your texts and how it has shaped meaning.

*Better responses demonstrated a conceptual understanding of the module through detailed analysis of the interrelationship between the two texts studied. They demonstrated a clear understanding of how context influenced the values and ideas in both texts. These responses considered the key terms of disruption, aspirations or independence and identity as a basis for the thesis developed in their response.*